

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church (Preferred)

and/or common New Central Social Hall

2. Location

street & number 901 East Eager Street at the southeast corner of Valley Street not for publication

city, town Baltimore vicinity of congressional district Tenth

state Maryland code 24 county Baltimore (city) code 510

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Community Center

4. Owner of Property

name The Redeptorists, Inc. Telephone: 342-3224

street & number 1225 East Eager Street

city, town Baltimore vicinity of state Maryland 21202

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Records Office, Courthouse, Room 601 Liber: WA 3766 Folio: 662

street & number

city, town Baltimore state Maryland 21202

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Maryland Historical Trust
Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1980 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust

city, town Annapolis, state Maryland 21401

7. Description

B-3607

Condition

☐ excellent
☐ good
☒ fair

Check one

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

☒ original site

☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, now known as the New Central Social Hall, is an 1855-1856 Italianate influenced masonry structure that is constructed of stuccoed brick walls resting on a rubble stone foundation and has twin square towers flanking the main facade and a semi-octagonal apse flanked by one-story pavilions extending from the back. The main facade or north elevation is a five part ensemble that expresses the spatial components of the interior. The nave and clerestory extend forward into a large two-story central volume; the aisles are represented by two one-story minor volumes that stand slightly set back on either side; the two towers stand extended fully from the sides of the building, set back about two feet from the aisle facades. The towers rise to a level just higher than that of the nave roof peak; small, steep pyramidal roofs cap the towers. There are three portal arches in the center section of the main facade, several steps above the sidewalk. The doors are set deep in the arches, making the arches tunnel-like. The steps continue into the arches, further emphasizing their depth. The upper story has three tall round-top windows with a bulls-eye in a tympanum above the center window. In adapting the building to its new purpose, most of the interior decorative artwork and accessories associated with church use were removed. The basic structural elements and spatial organization remain intact and unaltered.

DESCRIPTION

The Saint John the Evangelist Church, now known as the New Central Social Hall, stands at the southeast corner of Eager and Valley Streets, with the entrance at the northern or Eager Street elevation. It stands just north of the Oldtown area in a neighborhood of Baltimore rowhouses and low rise housing projects. Its twin towers, rising above the surrounding housing, are a neighborhood landmark. The building now serves as a neighborhood center for athletic, cultural, and social programs, administered by the nearby church of St. James and St. John. In adapting the building to its new purpose, most of the interior decorative artwork and accessories associated with church use were removed. The basic structural elements and spatial organization remain intact and unaltered.

The building is a mid-century Italianate adaptation of an Early Christian basilica, containing a nave, clerestory and aisles. Two square towers flank the main facade, and a semi-octagonal apse, with a one-story pavilion on either side, extends from the rear. The building is constructed of stone rubble on the basement level and stucco-covered brick on the upper stories. The stucco is painted a buff color.

The main facade is a five part ensemble that expresses the spatial components of the interior. The nave and clerestory extend forward into a large two-story central volume; the aisles are represented by two one-story minor volumes that stand slightly set back on either side; the two towers stand extended fully from the sides of the building, set back about two feet from the aisle facades. The towers rise to a level just higher than that of the nave roof peak; small, steep pyramidal roofs cap the towers.

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SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #1

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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church

Continuation sheet Baltimore (city) Maryland Item number 7 Page 1

East and west elevations of the church show a five bay main section with one-story pavilion additions at the rear, out of which the apse rises to the full height of the church. On the aisle walls each bay is expressed by a recessed panel into which are cut two tall arched windows. In the clerestory each bay is expressed by two small arched windows. The rear additions are not part of this bay scheme; the pavilions have windows smaller than the aisle windows; round windows at the clerestory level adorn four sides of the apse, and a blind arcade highlights the upper edges of the apse walls.

A small two-story brick addition, built shortly after the church itself, abuts the east wall of the church near the rear. It once connected the church to a rectory which stood to the east. The rectory has been demolished. The small brick addition now houses offices.

The interior is differentiated clearly and systematically into five spaces: the nave, the two aisles, the apse and a rectangular space at the north end that houses the narthex and the organ loft. The nave is separated from the aisles by two five-part arcades, corresponding to the five bays. Richly decorated cast iron columns support the arches. The same columns support six transverse round arches high above the nave. The ceiling over the nave is a high, wide segmental vault that rests on the transverse arches. The ceilings over the aisles are low, narrow segmental vaults. The southernmost transverse arch opens onto the semi-cotagonal vaulted apse, and the northernmost arch opens onto the wide shallow space housing the narthex and loft. The loft cantilevers as a balcony about ten feet into the nave space, and it is bounded by a broadly curving balustrade.

In adapting the building for use as a multi-purpose hall, most of the church accouterments and non-structural ornament were removed, but some items remain. The large stained glass aisle windows have been removed, but the small clerestory stained glass windows remain, as do the round stained glass windows in the apse. (The apse windows are covered on the interior but visible on the exterior.) There is a small assortment of nineteenth century ornamental detail remaining including a plaster ceiling rosette, a marble plaque, and some fresco remnants.

The building is in need of rehabilitation. The roof ceiling, walls and floors need repairs to preserve the structural integrity of the former church.

8. Significance

B-3607

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates Built 1855-1856
Addition built 1882

Builder/Architect Niernsee and Neilson,
E. F. Baldwin

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, now known as the New Central Social Hall, in Baltimore achieves significance from its architectural character. As a church executed in a richly ornamented interpretation of the Italianate style, Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church embodies the distinctive features of a period and type of architecture that, while popular in Baltimore from the 1850s and 1870s for residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, was not commonly used for church structures. The important features are twin square towers; round arch window, vent, and entrance openings, and a stuccoed exterior facade surface with belt courses and recessed bays. The building is the most intact remaining example of an Italianate public edifice in Baltimore. The church achieves additional architectural significance as the work of the Baltimore architectural firm of Niernsee and Neilson, the partnership responsible for the designs of several of the grand public and private buildings in the city in the mid to late nineteenth century.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

The Italianate Style was very popular in Baltimore from the 1850s to the 1870s, and Italianate houses, schools, commercial and industrial buildings abound. Churches, however, were generally built in the Gothic or Classical Revival styles. Italianate churches are relatively unusual in the city and the old St. John the Evangelist Church is the best of these. The church was designed by John Rudolph Niernsee and John Crawford Neilson. Their partnership was one of the premier architectural firms in Baltimore in the mid to late nineteenth century. They were versatile talents, and their work ranged from townhouses such as the Gladding House and the Asbury House in the Mount Vernon National Historic Landmark District to country houses such as the demolished "Alexandroffsky" to train stations such as Camden Station and the demolished Calvert Station, all in the Italianate style. The architects were also adept at the Gothic Revival, having designed the Greenmount Cemetery Chapel (included in the Greenmount Cemetery National Register listing) and the Grace and Saint Peter's Church (in the Baltimore City Mount Vernon Historic District). Saint John the Evangelist bears great resemblance in its Italianate detailing, twin-tower composition and tripartite portals (the towers and portals are almost identical) to the demolished Calvert Station. Niernsee is also the designer of the South Carolina State Capitol and a cofounder of the American Institute of Architects.

In 1882 an addition to the apse and the rear corner pavilions were designed by E. Francis Baldwin, another of Baltimore's foremost architects. The addition harmonizes with the materials, color, and Italianate style of the original building without obscuring the extent of the original construction. The addition does not merge anonymously into the bay scheme of the original, and the exterior clearly expresses the different interior spaces.

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Saint John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church

Continuation sheet Baltimore (city) Maryland Item number 8 and 9 Page 2

Baldwin also worked in a wide range of building types and styles. His great industrial monument, the Mount Clare Roundhouse, is a National Historic Landmark. With his early partner Bruce Price he designed the Gothic Revival Christ Church; but he made his greatest mark in partnership with Josias Pennington. Baldwin and Pennington were perhaps the most important local firm of the late nineteenth century. Much of their work was in the popular Richardsonian Romanesque style, including the Mount Royal Station (a National Historic Landmark), the Maryland Club (also in the Mount Vernon Historic District), and the Fidelity Building in Baltimore.

The Saint John the Evangelist Church is a landmark in the history of Baltimore's Irish community. In the 1840s and 1850s Ireland was beset by a succession of economic, social, and political upheavals, generating a heavy flow of Irish immigrants to the United States. Many of those immigrants came to Baltimore, and they formed the nucleus of a new Catholic community, the parish of St. John the Evangelist. The Reverend Bernard J. McManus, who had come to America from Ireland in 1836, founded the parish in 1853 in a small chapel on Valley Street. The congregation grew quickly, and a larger facility was needed almost immediately.

During the Civil War a Union Army garrison and hospital were stationed on McKim's Hill - now Johnson Square - near the church. Catholic soldiers from the garrison attended services at the church, and The Reverend McManus served unofficially as a Catholic chaplain to the garrison and to the military hospital. For the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century St. John the Evangelist Church continued to grow in size, stature, and importance in Baltimore's Irish-American community. Throughout this period the church sponsored a wide range of educational, social, cultural, and charitable activities that touched every facet of the parishioners' daily lives.

By the 1960s most of the Catholic Irish-Americans had moved out of the area and had been replaced by a mostly non-Catholic black population. In 1966 Saint John the Evangelist Church was forced to close because of dwindling numbers, and was merged into the nearby St. James church, forming the present-day parish of St. James and St. John. The former St. John the Evangelist's building was converted into a neighborhood center for social, cultural, and athletic programing.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (continued)

4. Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory: Baltimore City (B-3607), Jeffrey Hornick, preparer.

9. Major Bibliographical References

B-3607

1. American Architect; Volume 12, July-December 1882, B.P. Sept. 30, 1882, 163
2. Braun, Joseph V., St. John the Evangelist Church, Baltimore, Maryland 1853-1853 (Centennial Book)
- Chalfant, Randolph W., "Calvert Station; Its Structure and Significance"; Maryland Historical Magazine; Volume 74 No. 1, March 1979 SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #2

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acreQuadrangle name Baltimore EastQuadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	8
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3	6	1	6	1	0
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4	3	5	2	1	2	0
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Zone

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Northing

B

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Zone

Easting

Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Located at the southeast corner of Eager and Valley Streets on Baltimore City Block No. 1202, Section 7/8, Lot 3. The Dimensions of the property are 85.6" along Eager Street on the north, 159'5½" along Valley St. on the west, 77'4" on the south, and 159'6" on the east.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeffrey Honick, Planning Assistantorganization Commission for Historic and Architectural Preservationdate November 1980street & number 100 North Holliday Street Room 601, City Halltelephone (301) 396-4866city or town Baltimorestate Maryland 21202

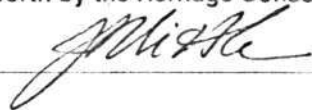
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state * local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

2-5-82

title _____ date _____

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

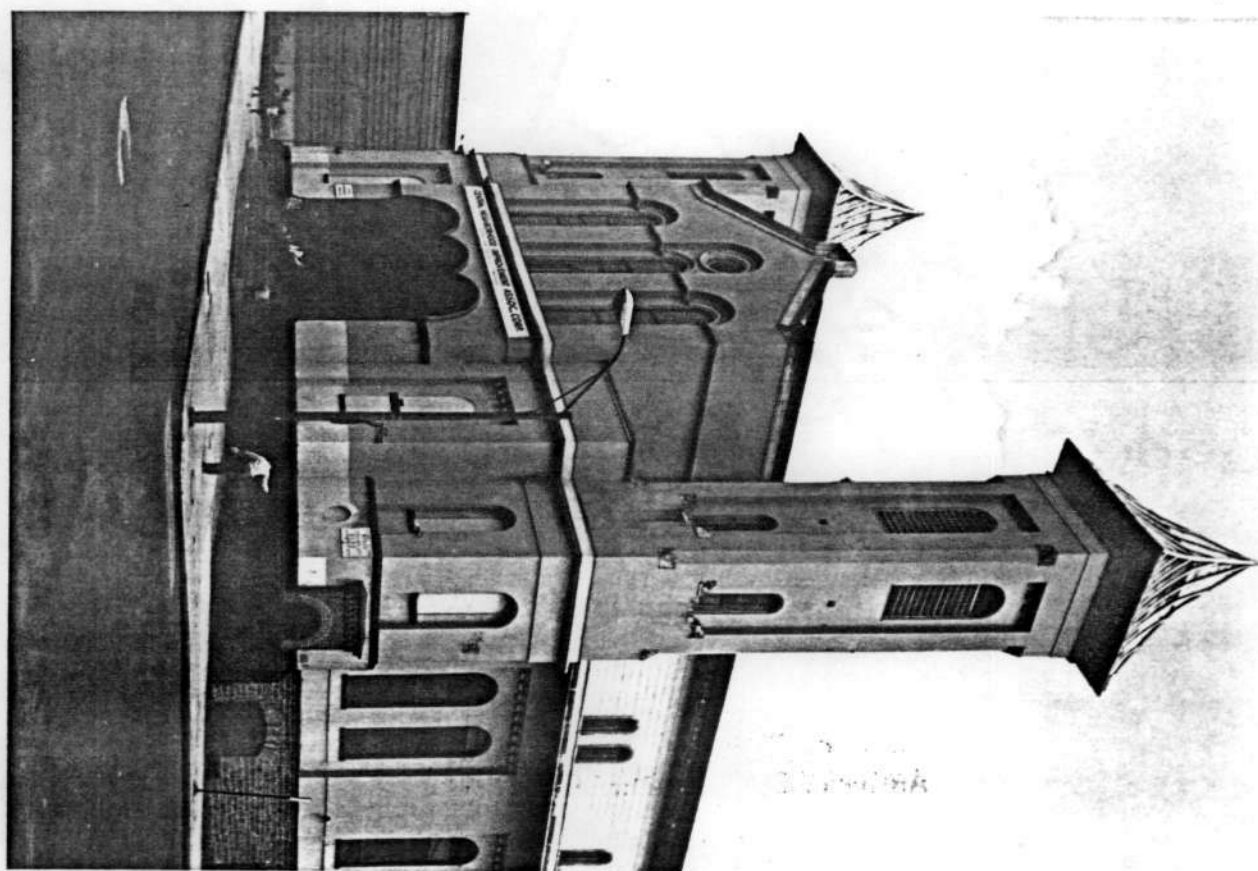
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

B-3607



B-3607

ST. JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

JUNE 1980

NEG. AT CHAP

VIEW FROM N.W. (EXTERIOR) 1/13

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Baltimore, Md. 21202

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ST JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

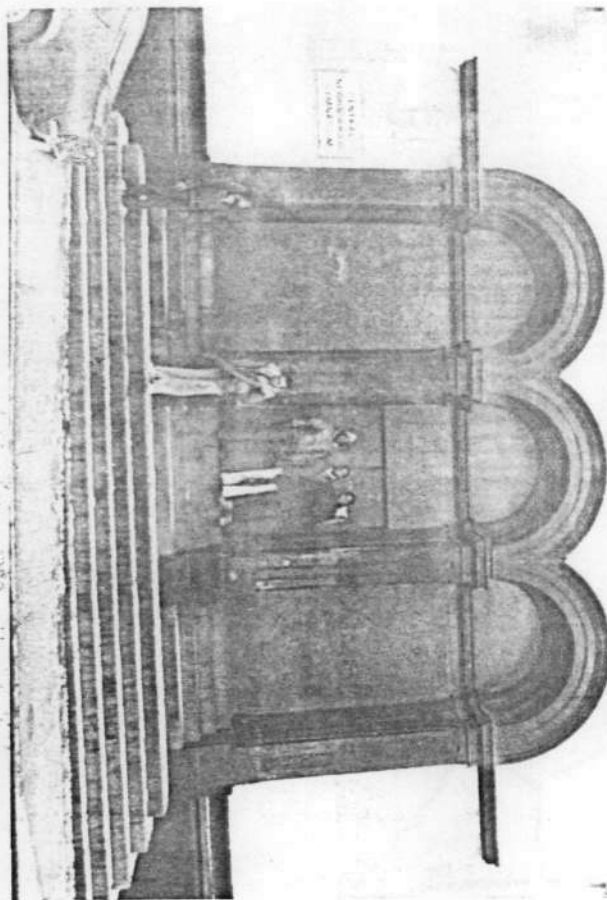
JUNE 1980

NEG. AT CHAP

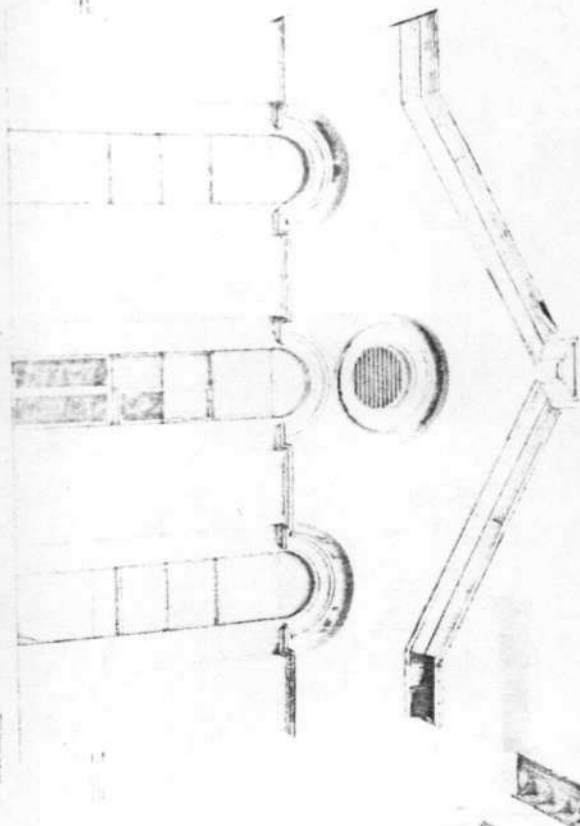
MAIN FACADE FROM N.W.
(EXTERIOR) 2/13

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CENTRAL NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT ASSOC., CORP.



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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

FEB. 1980

NEG. AT CHAP

MAIN ENTRANCE
(EXTERIOR)

3/13

B-3607

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

JUNE 1980

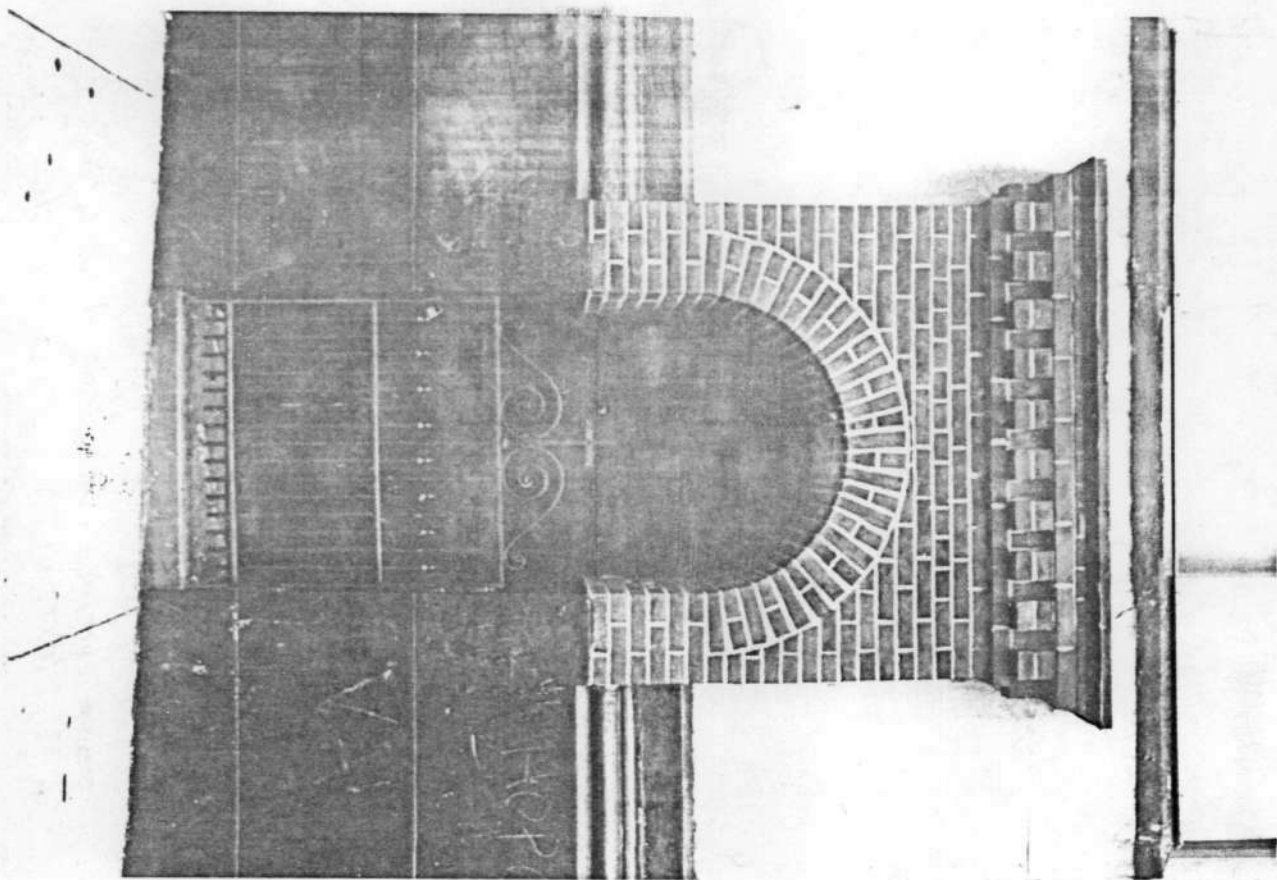
NEG. AT CHAP →

MAIN ENTRANCE - NORTH FACADE
EXTERIOR

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ST. JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

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NEG. AT CHAP

SIDE ENTRANCE - WEST SIDE OF WEST TOWER

(EXTERIOR)

5/13

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ST. JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

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NEG. AT CHAP

VIEW FROM S.W.
(EXTERIOR)

6/13

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ST. JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

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NEG. AT CHAP

VIEW FROM ORGAN LOFT TOWARD APSE
(INTERIOR) 8/13

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ST. JOHN CHURCH

EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

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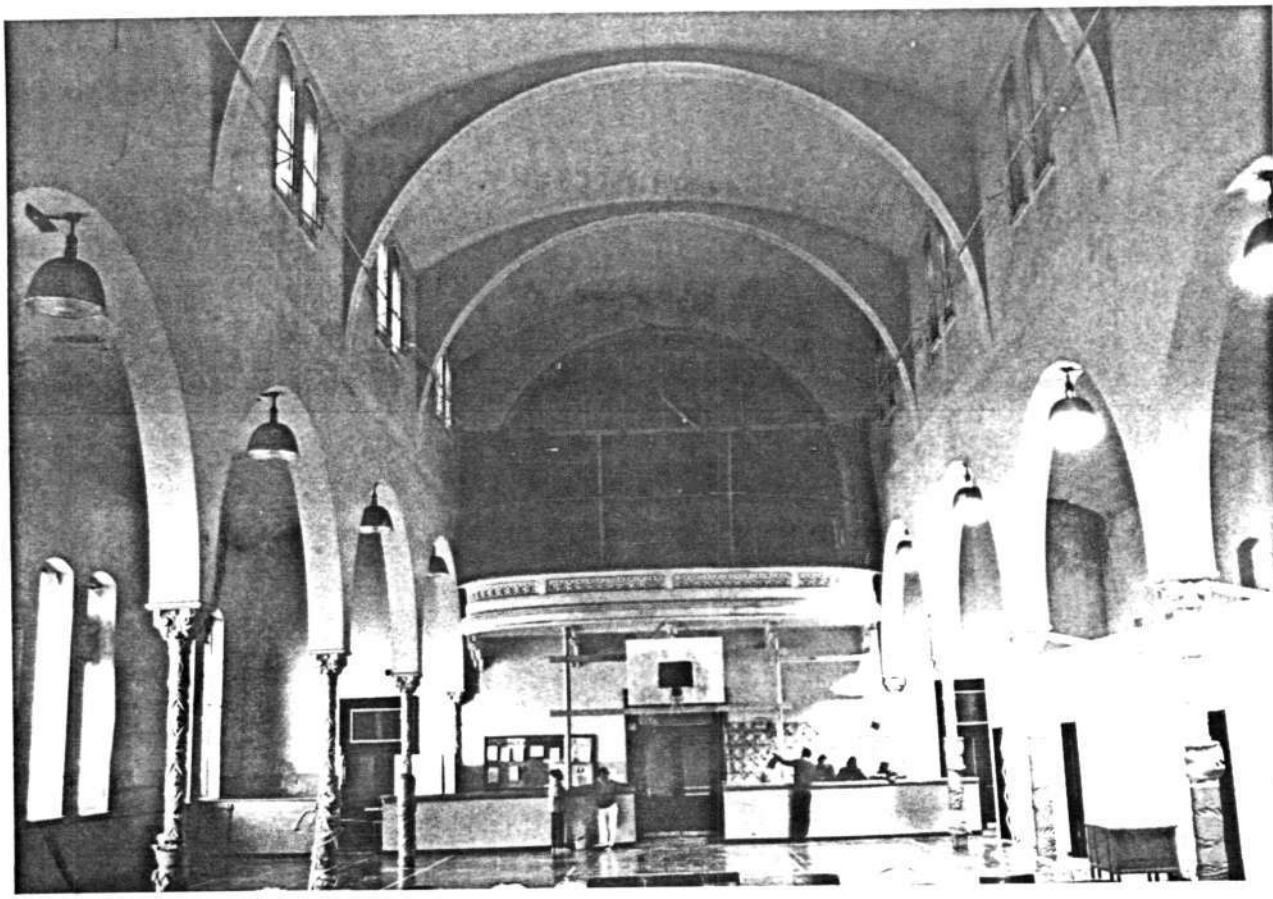
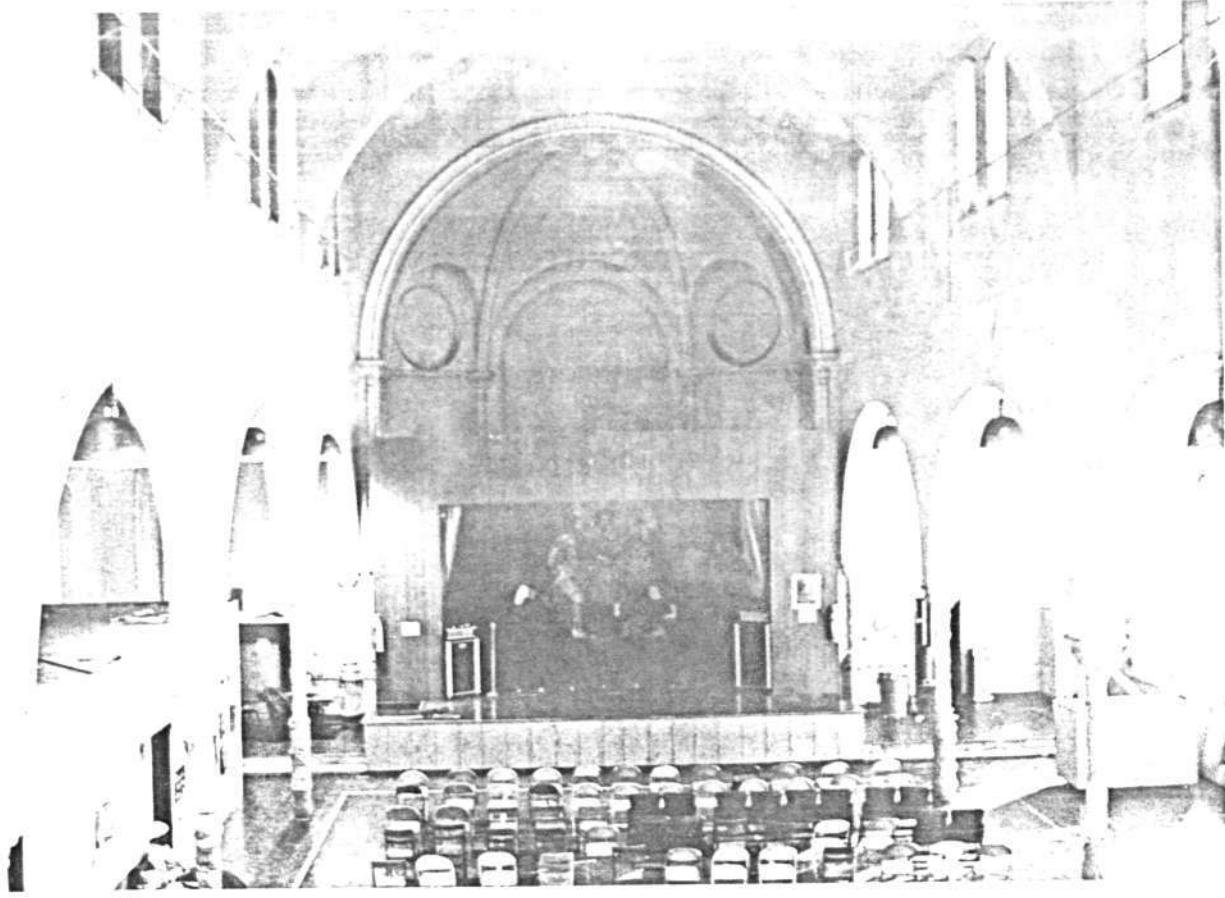
NEG. AT CHAP

REAR ADDITION OF 1832; VIEW FROM WEST
(EXTERIOR) 7/13

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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

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VIEW FROM LOFT TOWARD APSE 9/13
(INTERIOR)

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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

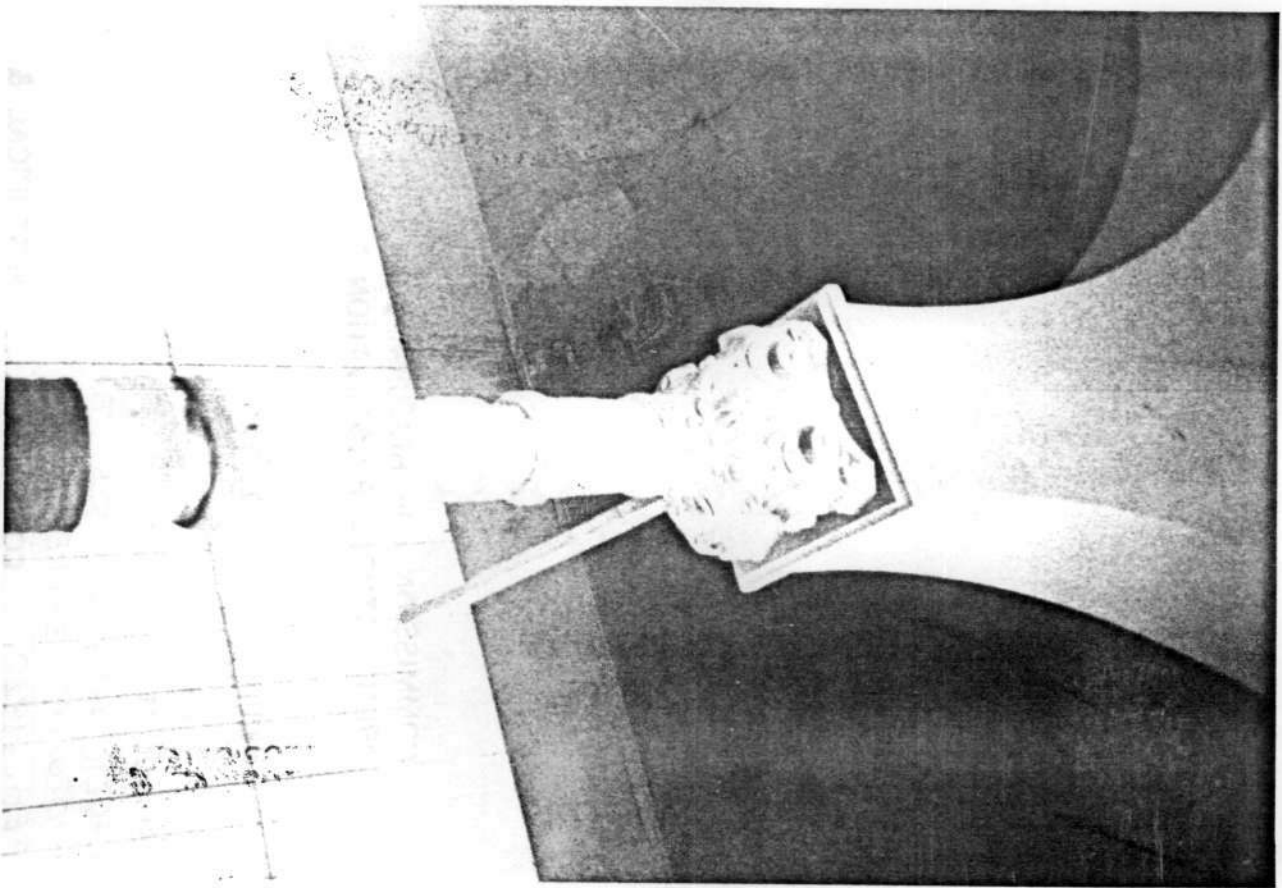
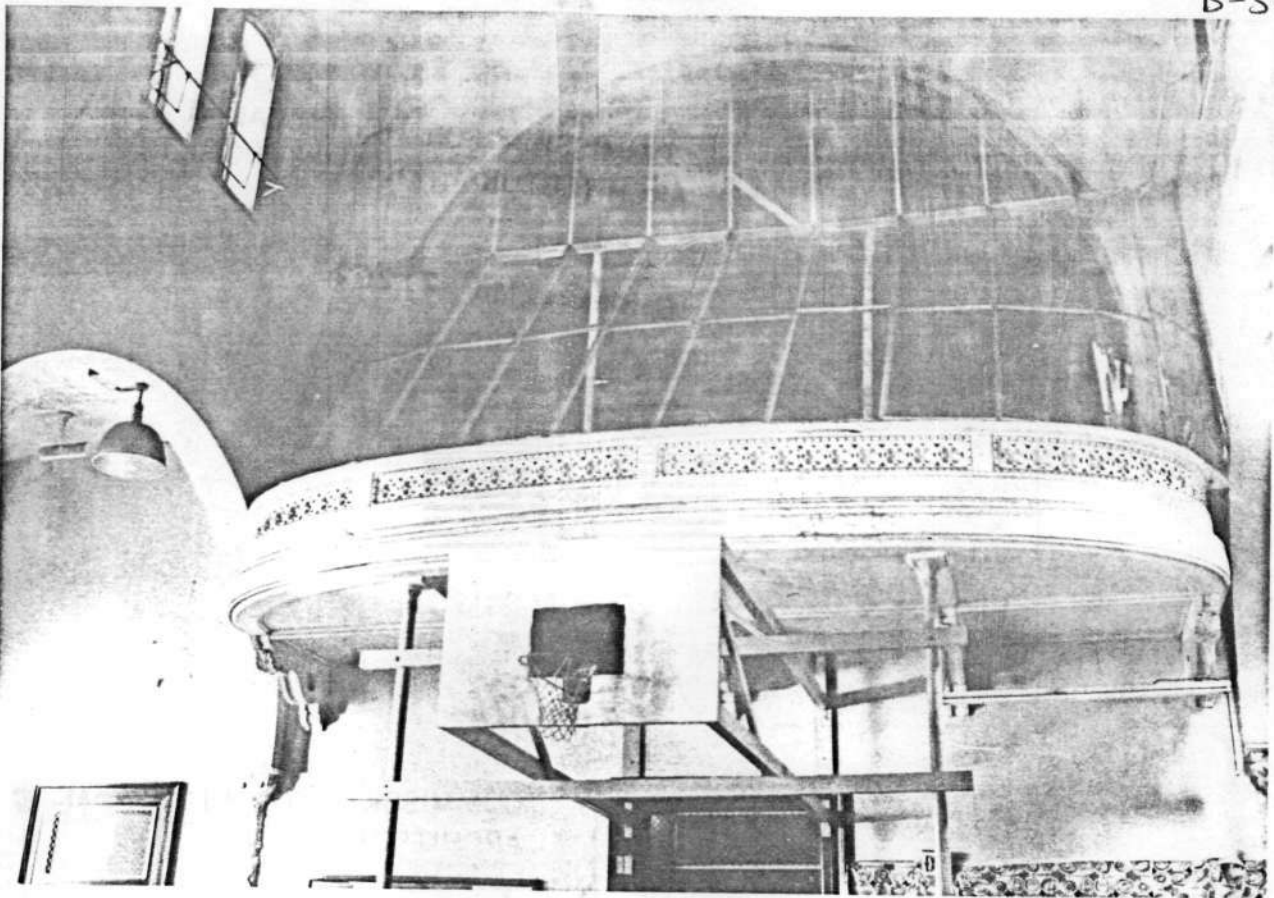
EAGER & VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

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NEG. AT CHAP

INTERIOR VIEW FROM ALTAR AREA TOWARD
ORGAN LOFT (INTERIOR) 10/13



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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

EAGER and VALLEY STS. - BALTIMORE CITY

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NEG. AT CHAP ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

TYPICAL CAST IRON COLUMN (INTERIOR)

12/13

B-3607



B-3607

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
EAGER & VALLEY STS. BALTIMORE CITY
PHOTO BY JEFFREY HONICK

FEB 1980

NEG. AT CHAP

LIGHT FIXTURE POINTE IN CEILING OF ROOM

IN 1332 ADDITION (INTERIOR) 13/13

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Baltimore, Md. 21202

Baltimore East Quad.

